

Homily for the Fourth Sunday of Easter

The Lord is my Shepherd.

At the side of our house we have a drive that slopes down into the field where we have an enclosed area for our dogs. Now usually they are quite good and they go straight from the house and into the field. However, on occasions curiosity gets the better of them and they set off to explore up the drive.

That was dangerous so we decided to put a gate at the top so they couldn't get out. To keep them in when perhaps they would have preferred to explore the world beyond!

When you think about it we are surrounded with gates keeping us out or in! For instance:-

The gates at football matches.

The gates when you come back into the country.

Then we have garden gates.

Kissing gates.

Field gates.

Stair gates.

City gates

And so many more!

It seems to me all gates can have two purposes.

To let people out.

Or to keep people either in or out

It seems to me there are so many different kinds of gates and here in our gospel today we have Jesus talking about gates.

He says:-

"I am the gate for the sheep."

"I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved."

And later.

"He will come in and go out and find pasture."

So it seems Jesus was saying he is the gate that leads us into life and it's only through him that we can have eternal or everlasting life. But perhaps Jesus wasn't just talking about life after death.

He says:-

"We will come in and go out and find pasture."

The sheep in his story come in and go out through the gate and find pasture. So they are not just stuck in the pen. It seems they have a freedom to come and go whenever they please. They are free to roam the hillside and to return at will.

But even when they are out they are still not on their own. How is that?

It seems Jesus is the Good Shepherd and a good shepherd cares for his sheep wherever they may be. So Jesus is both the Good shepherd and he is also the gate that gives them a safe place to come home to.

He takes care of his people and yet he gives them the freedom to roam.

A good shepherd would actually lie down in the gateway to the pen and become a physical gate to protect his sheep. I like that picture of Jesus lying down across the gateway to protect us.

Remember verse 10 in our reading:-

"I have come that they might have life, and have it abundantly."

(or to the full in some translations)

That is quite a liberating concept. Not to be kept in a pen but free to roam and have life.

It seems Jesus wants us to have abundant life.

A life in all it's fullness.

That means:-

A life of exploration for us.

A life of activity for us.

A life of discovery for us.

A life in all it's fullness.

But like the sheep who roam the hillside to find good pasture and return to the safety of pen we too need to balance our lives. I think we need a healthy balance between activity and peacefulness.

For me that means balancing our time.

Sadly it's easy to get that wrong.

We have become what today is called a 24/7 society. TV, The internet.

Even the shops seem to be open all day and some all night.

Many of us find it difficult to stop.

Jesus said:-

"I have come that they might have life, and have it abundantly."

I believe that means balancing our lives and giving time to God.

Just listen to these words from a Scottish blessing.

Deep peace of the running wave to you

Deep peace of the flowing air to you,

Deep peace of the quiet earth to you,

Deep peace of the shining stars to you, deep peace of the Son of Peace to you, forever.

Peace to you. The peace of the risen Christ to you.

Revd. Stephen